

Dragonshards

Druids of Khorvaire, Part Three

By Keith Baker



Druids are found across Khorvaire, and the Siyal Marrain of the Valenar are quite different from the Gatekeepers of the Shadow Marches. The ***Eberron Campaign Setting*** and *Player's Guide to Eberron* focus on the druids of the western coast of Khorvaire. This article examines one of the druidic traditions of the east: the halflings of the Talenta Plains.

Mask Weavers

Where the Valenar warrior seeks to channel the spirit of his ancestor through his heroic deeds, the Talenta druid believes that her ancestors are all around her, affecting every aspect of life. The druid serves as the intermediary between the worlds and guides her people on the journey of life. The halflings believe that the dead are drawn to Dolurrh and must fight their way free to return to the world. A halfling possesses two tools to help him in this battle: his mount and his mask. The spirit of a halfling's mount joins with him in Dolurrh, and it is their combined strength that gives them the chance to return. His mask holds his spirit or the spirit of his mount -- whichever dies first -- preserving it so that they may be together in the afterlife; many say that when a rider bonds with a new mount, the spirit of the old will flow from his mask to join with that of the living beast. Some whisper of rituals a warrior can use to trap the spirits of his fallen enemies in his mask and use their strength as his own, though most say that such dark magic will corrupt the caster and transform him into a demon after death.

One of the first duties of the druid is to help her people craft their spirit masks, and as a result druids are often called mask weavers. The druid serves many other crucial roles in her community. She heals the sick and injured. She helps to find and train clawfeet, fastieths, and the other beasts that the nomadic tribes rely on. She serves as a diplomat for the tribe, both when dealing with other tribes and with the spirits of nature. And she acts as a storyteller and record keeper, preserving the oral traditions of her people and passing them down to the next generation.

While mask weavers recognize one another as peers, their first loyalty is to the other members of their tribe.

Talenta Spirit Masks

The spirit mask serves as the divine focus for a druid who follows the mask weaver tradition. Druids have also learned to bind the favor of a particular spirit to a mask, creating wondrous items holding the power of *bull's strength*, *fox's cunning*, *cat's grace*, and similar spells. The halflings believe that once a rider and his mount are dead, the mask must be burnt to release the spirits within into Dolurrh. This does not prevent *raise dead* or any other spell that interacts with departed spirits from working on the owner or the mask. Whether there is any truth to the beliefs of the halflings is up to the DM!

The tales of the soul-eaters are stories told to frighten children. However, if a DM wants to explore these legends, adventurers could encounter halflings whose masks allow them to cast *death knell*... or worse still, masks that add the *Keeper's fang* quality to any weapon used by the wearer.

While the spirit mask may be as much a symbol as anything else, these masks are vitally important to the Talenta halflings. A halfling adventurer could be charged to recover the lost mask of a great hero, so that it can be destroyed in accord with the proper rituals.

Even when a mask weaver dies without training a successor, a tribe will not turn to an outsider in search of aid; instead they will simply wait, confident that the spirits themselves will speak to one of the children of the tribe and teach him the secrets of the mask weavers. While it is rare for a mask weaver to leave his tribe, there are two ways it can happen. Occasionally a young druid is called forth by the spirits and ordered to go out into the world, in search of a hidden destiny that is far more important than his service to the tribe. The morbid alternative is when a tribe is destroyed. Even during feuds, enemy warriors will try to avoid harming a mask weaver, since many say this will bring bad luck to the slayer. As a result, a mask weaver may find herself the last surviving member of her tribe. Most of these orphans leave the Plains, searching for a new life in the wider world. Either of these could serve as background for an adventurer. Diplomacy, Heal, and Perform (oratory) are critical skills for a mask weaver. Talenta druids may take the Greensinger Initiate feat, though they have no ties to the Eldeen sect or to Thelanis; it is simply a case of parallel development based on the values and traditions of the mask weavers.

The druidic path is not the only way to show reverence for the spirits. Talenta clerics usually worship the sovereign Balinor, although halflings claim that Balinor was once a great hunter of the Talenta Plains. If a DM is using *Complete Divine*, the spirit shaman class is also suitable for Talenta priests.

Next: More druids of other cultures!

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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